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THE STORY TELLER.

The Christmas Ball;

OR, THE LOW-NECKED DRESS.

BY SYA MILFORD.

'I suppose, Miss Montgomery, you will have

your dress to come off the shoulders, shan't you?

This speech was made by Miss Brown, the

fashionable dress-maker of our village, to Fanny

Montgomery, who with her mother was presid-

ing over the making of an elegant dress, in

which Miss Fanny intended to shine at a Christ-

mas ball, at which she particularly wished to ap-

pear well. The dress was now being 'fitted' and

Miss Brown stood, shears in hand, ready to cut

the already low neck to the prescribed dimen-

sions.

'Oh no, Fanny,' interposed Mrs. Montgom-

ery, 'pray don't have it any lower than it now

is.'

'Mercy on me, Ma'am!' hastily interrupted

Miss Brown, 'that don't begin to be low enough.

Why, the fashion plates that I have just receiv-

ed from Boston, are as much as two inches low-

er than that, and Miss Mason, Miss Scott and

Miss Robertson all have had new dresses for

this ball, and I cut all of them away of the shoul-

ders—I'm sure Miss Fanny's neck is twice as

handsome as either of theirs, and I don't see

why she shouldn't show it.'

'Oh, mamma,' added Fanny, in a pleading

voice, 'do let me have it low—I'm sure if Mary

Robertson has her's so, it must be right, for she

is always in the fashion, and—and—I want it so

mamma, very much.'

'Well, child, have it your own way; but I

must say I do not think it modest or becoming

in a young girl to expose herself in this way.'

'Oh, mamma, I'm sure it can't be immodest

when so many people do it.'

'A great many people have been murderers

Fanny; does that prove it right to murder,

Fanny?'

'No, indeed, mamma, but that is quite differ-

ent.'

'How is it different, Fanny?'

'Why, I don't know—because—'

'Lucid reasoning, upon my word, Fanny—'

But Miss Brown is waiting to hear your deci-

sion about the dress—How will you have it cut?'

'Well, I will have it—low I think—that is,

if you do not object, mamma.'

'I am willing, dear, you should have it the

way which suits you best.'

'Thank you! then, Miss Brown, I will have

it low, if you are sure it will be becoming.'

Why was Fanny so anxious that her dress

should be fashionable and becoming? I don't

believe you know, so I will tell you, reader—

A few days previous to the commencement of

my story, Dr. Heath had informed us girls, that

a handsome, wealthy, talented and agreeable

city beau, to whom he stood in the relation of

cousin, was coming down to spend Christmas in

our little village, and would be at the Christmas

ball. 'So girls,' concluded the doctor, 'I advise

you all to look your best and act your prettiest,

for Hazleton says he wants a wife, and means

to see if he can't fall in love down here.'

'Dr. Heath, did you say he was good-look-

ing?' asked little Annie Selwyn, with a mischiev-

ous smile on her pretty lips.

'Good-looking, Annie! why 'tis profanation

to apply such a term to him! he's a perfect

Adonis, and I expect will carry off all your

hearts. We poor village beauties will be quite for-

gotten, if we are not already.' And poor Dr.

Heath glanced almost imperceptibly at Fanny

Montgomery. Slight as was his glance, Fanny

saw it, and went most industriously to work

flirting with young Green, on whom she had

before hardly deigned to cast a glance. Dr.

Heath watched her for a few moments with

rather a bitter smile, and then turning to Ellen

Mason, he devoted himself to her during the re-

mainder of the evening. Fanny watched him

out of the corner of her eye, and inwardly re-

solved, that if Frank Hazleton should prove at

all to her taste, Dr. Heath should repent intro-

'How do you do, Lizzy?' said Fanny, 'how

do you like my new dress?'

'The material is very pretty,' answered her

cousin, 'but—'

'But what? Lizzy?'

'Lizzy probably thinks, as I do, that it leaves

your neck too much exposed for either beauty

or modesty,' remarked Mrs. Montgomery.

'Now, mother, why will you keep saying that

You don't think so, do you Lizzy?'

'Why, Fanny, since you drive me to it, I

must say that I should hardly like to wear it so

very low.'

'Why, Lizzy, it's all the fashion, and Miss

Brown says that all the girls have them so.'

'I know it,' answered Lizzy, with a quiet

smile, 'but I make it a rule never to do what I do

not approve of, merely because other people do.

Miss Brown can tell you that she tried very hard

to persuade me to have mine made in the same

manner; but I believe, Miss Brown, you finally

concluded that your rhetoric was only thrown

away on me.'

'Why yes, Miss Warren,' answered the dress-

maker, 'I found you more set about having your

own way than I should have judged from your

face.'

'When I know 'my way' is the right one, I

am generally pretty determined upon it. But

really Fanny, don't you think that dress a little

to low?'

'No, not a bit,' answered Fanny, rather

warmly, for she was determined to defend her

dress to the death, as the saying is. Lizzy said

no more, and Fanny wore the dress.

Christmas night had come, and we were all

assembled in the hall in which our village balls

were usually celebrated. Dr. Heath and his

friend Hazleton had not yet made their appear-

ance, and many bright glances were directed

impudently towards the door.

Decidedly the two prettiest girls in the room

where Fanny Montgomery and Lizzy Warren,

although their appearance was very different.

Fanny in full consciousness of her low-

necked dress and her mother and cousin's dis-

approval of it, had an unusually naughty curl

to her beautiful mouth, and her head was per-

haps a little more thrown back than usual,

while her cheeks glowed and her eyes sparkled

from a feeling, which, if analyzed, might have

proved to have been partly the consciousness of

having had her own way—partly a knowledge

that she was very handsome, and—looking in

the depths of her heart—an uneasy feeling that

she had not done well in disregarding the ad-

vice of her kind mother. Lizzy Warren, on

the contrary, modest, quiet, and retiring, remind-

ed one of a fringed gentian, wet with morning

dew, and striving to hide its marvellous beauty

under its broad leaves.

The door at length opened, and this time ad-

mitted the right personage. As Mr. Hazleton

entered, each fair maiden decided in her own

mind that the accounts she had heard of his good

looks were not exaggerated. He was a man such

as 'women love to look upon,' with his tall man-

ly form and handsome, intelligent face. He

was of course favored with an introduction to

every one in the room, and the evening went

on right merrily. The ball was nearly half done

and Dr. Heath and his cousin were standing a

little apart from the crowd and commenting up-

on the merits of the gay scene.

'And Frank,' continued the Doctor, 'what do

you think of Fanny Montgomery? Was I

wrong in calling her the most beautiful girl in

Willowvale?'

'Humph! she is certainly handsome, and does

excellently for a partner at a ball, but I must

say I should never care to meet her except at

some such place.'

'What do you mean, Frank? Do you know

anything about her? Have you ever seen her

before?'

'Never?'

'Then why do you speak thus? Do you im-

agine that you see indications of a bad temper

or want of intellect in her face? If so, let me

tell you that I have known her intimately for

more than a year, and—'

'Is it even so, fair Cox? Are you so hot in

defence of this young lady? But let me explain

before you challenge me to mortal combat. I

see nothing in her face that would indicate a

Katharine or a fool. The only thing which

leads to my opinion is—'

'Well, is what?'

'Her low-necked dress.'

The doctor burst into a loud laugh, which for

some time would not permit him to reply; but

at length, wiping his eyes, he exclaimed—

'Excuse me, my dear fellow, but really the

idea of judging a woman's character by the fash-

ion of her gown, is too absurd.'

'Laugh on, my friend; but when you have

done permit me to explain. It is not so much

the fashion of her gown, as the principle that

governs it. A woman who would from vanity ex-

pose herself in that manner, cannot have that

delicate and refined modesty without which wo-

man to me can be nothing. Now, this Miss

Montgomery would, I make no doubt, wait with

a stranger, if she should be asked; and I hold

that a woman who would do that, is not fit for

a wife for an honest man. She is only a trifle with

which a man may chat and laugh and bandy

compliments; but who would take to his heart

and his inmost confidence, one whom every lib-

ertine may clasp in his arms and hold to his

breast, although the audacity may be privileged

by custom and glossed over with the name of

waltzing? Not I for one.'

'Hardly go as far as you, Frank, although I

admit that I should hardly dare to call a woman

'wife' whom I had seen walking with a stranger.

But you were never more mistaken, my dear

fellow, than in thinking Fanny Montgomery one

of these. She never waltzes with any gentle-

man, excepting her brothers and cousin, and

once or twice perhaps with me, or some other

intimate friend.'

'Harry, I have not the smallest doubt that if

I go and ask her to waltz with me, that she will

do it, although she never exchanged ten words

with me in her life, and knows nothing of me.'

'I would be willing to wager my soul that you

could not persuade her to do it by any argument

in your power. I have too good an opinion of

her.'

'Shall I try?'

'Yes; but I advise you to make up your

mind to a mortifying refusal.'

'Well, Harry, will you make me one prom-

ise? If she consents—if I can prove to you that

she is as false, fickle, and light as I think her,

will you accept of my proposal of to-day, and re-

turn with me to the city to-morrow? I now

clearly see that the chain which holds you here

is love to that girl. And trust me, Harry, she

is not worthy of it. Your heart is too manly

and honorable to be placed in the keeping of

such a butterfly as that. Make me this promise

my dear cousin; think of the brilliant prospect

that the city opens to you; and why should you

sacrifice them for a woman who only looks up

on you as one of a string of admirers, and who,

when you are away, no doubt gives to any other

man the same glances and inflections of voice

which I suppose have turned your head?'

The young doctor cast down his eyes, and for

a few moments thought deeply. When he spoke

his voice assumed a more earnest and deeper

tone than before. 'Cousin Frank,' said he, 'I

know you seek to do me good I thank you for it,

and you know I have always been disposed to

rely very much on your judgment. I trust, how-

ever, that you are mistaken in your estimate of

Fanny's character; I hope so, most fervently,

for I will not deny to you, Frank, that her im-

age fills a large place in my heart. Let this,

then, be the test,—you notice that she wears a

rose-bud upon her bosom, which I have already

said for, and have been refused. If you can

induce her to waltz with you and to give you

that rose-bud, I will leave Willowvale with you

to-morrow; and make no doubt that I can soon

forget one unworthy of remembrance. Now go

and make the trial.'

Frank Hazleton crossed the room, and in

another moment made one of the knot of the

beaux who surrounded the beauty of the even-

ing. After some trivial conversation, Mr.

Hazleton made some remarks upon the beauty

of a waltz the band were playing; and then

bowing low, inquired:

'Will Miss Montgomery do the waltz and my-

self so distinguished an honor as to take part in

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